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# THE BATTLE OF KRUTY

*The Free World's First Resistance To Communism*

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## CONTENTS

	Page
1. Introduction.....	5
2. Bastion of the West.....	6
3. Historical Background.....	7
4. Organization of Youth and the Student Battalion.....	13
5. At the Front.....	15
6. Then Came January 29.....	15
7. The Significance of the Battle.....	17
8. Echo and the Message of Kruty.....	19

## INTRODUCTION

No sooner were the guns of the "October Revolution" silent, when Ukraine became the first victim of Bolshevik aggression. Among the numerous battles of that war, one which deserves special attention is the battle fought on January 29, 1918, near the town of Kruty (about 75 miles east of Kiev), by a battalion composed of Ukrainian students. Greatly outnumbered by the Bolsheviks, fighting against enemy force superior in battle experience and better equipped, this Student Battalion was completely wiped out. The majority of the students died in the battle, while those taken prisoner were inhumanly tortured and shot the next day. The battalion did its duty honorably. It delayed the enemy for several days and thus enabled the Ukrainian government to carry out an organized withdrawal from Kiev.

However, the moral significance of the Battle of Kruty is by far greater in that it produced a symbol under which subsequent Ukrainian generations were reared in anti-Bolshevik spirit. The Ukrainian students, living in countries not under the communist domination, celebrate the Anniversary of the Battle of Kruty to remind one and all of the unparallel bravery and devotion of the young heroes. To poets, writers, and artists, Kruty became an infinite source of inspiration.

The Ukrainian students in the free world are publishing this booklet to commemorate the 40th Anniversary of Kruty and to inform the free world about an event which was first to reveal the true meaning of the Russian-Bolshevik menace.

## BASTION OF THE WEST

A foremost Ukrainian poet, E. Malaniuk, refers to Ukraine as the "Hellas of the Steppes." This analogy is not coincidental. The poet deals mainly with spiritual similarities which resulted partly from the fact that Ukraine accepted Christianity from Greece (in 988 A.D.) and came under the cultural influence of Byzantium. From the early dawn of history, Greece—the "cradle of European culture" was the farthest thrust bastion of Europe. Its Persian Wars are considered to be, perhaps, the first "clash between East and West," and their causes as inherent in the "basic differences between Europe and Asia."

A similar role, that of the eastern bastion of Europe, fell to the medieval Ukraine. She resisted the onslaught of the invading Asiatic hordes of nomads, such as Bulgars, Avars, Pechenigs, Turks, and Polovitiens. The conquest and destruction of Kiev by the Tartars (in 1240) decided the fate of Ukraine for centuries to come, just as the fall of Constantinople to the Turks (in 1453) decided the fate of the Byzantine Empire.

True, this analogy is not complete, as no historical analogy is. Greece remained under Turkish rule almost four centuries, whereas the Tartar influence on Ukraine was much shorter. Ukraine, weakened by the Tartar invasion, was never able to rise to her former greatness. Frequently falling under the influence of her neighbors, she gradually lost her independence—first to Lithuania, then to Poland, and finally to Moscow, despite her efforts during the Kozak period so closely identified with the names of two Ukrainian leaders of that period, Bohdan Khmelnytsky, and Ivan Mazepa.

A full analogy cannot be drawn with regard to liberation. The liberation of Greece was preceded by eight years of constant struggle in which an important role was played by the West-European states; and free Greece is much indebted to the noble volunteer supporters of their cause, the most noted of whom was Lord Byron.

In the case of Ukraine, her hopes were centered on World War I to bring her liberation. However, unlike Greece, Ukraine did not receive support from the Western Nations and had to rely on her own resources in her fight for freedom.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Until World War I, the Ukrainian ethnographic territory was ruled by two great powers: approximately one tenth of it by the constitutional and democratic Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and the remainder by the autocratic Tzarist Russia. Generally speaking, the condition of the Ukrainian population under Austria-Hungary was tolerable; under the Tzarist Russia, however, it was most deplorable, both politically and socially. It will suffice to mention that serfdom was not abolished in the sparsely industrialized Russia until 1861. Until then, it existed there in the most primitive forms, with the peasant a virtual slave completely dependent on the whims of his lord. Special laws were passed to accomplish denationalization, prohibiting any publications in the Ukrainian language (the 1863 circular of the Minister of the Interior Waluyew, repeated in the so called "Yuzefowitch Ukaz" in 1876), suppressing all educational and cultural activities (including Sunday schools) and banishing many Ukrainian cultural leaders to exile. Consequently, the Ukrainians were awaiting the war of 1914 with subdued hopes that it will weaken the Russian empire and thereby improve their position as well as that of the other nations under Russian subjugation.

Thus, it was quite natural for the Ukrainians to greet the first tremors of the Russian Revolution in March 1917 with hopes and anticipations. They were inclined to believe the words of the more liberal Russian leaders that the revolution would bring a democratic rule, a minimum of political freedom and national rights, and perhaps even a reorganization of the Russian empire along federal lines, was at least partially satisfying the natural aspirations of the numerous subjugated peoples.

It was for this reason that the Ukrainian regiments, to crush the workers' uprising in St. Petersburg, joined the rebels; this was also the reason why these regiments, in the early stages of the victorious revolution in St. Petersburg, fought under their own national, blue and yellow colors, even though the slogans of the Russian revolutionary leaders merely called for social and economic changes in the empire's structure.

A few days after the Tzar's abdication, the Ukrainians created a government of their own, or rather a semblance of one—the Centralna Rada (Central Council), a preparliamentary body representing various Ukrainian political parties and other organizations, which was destined to completely sever Ukraine's ties with Russia within the next 10 months.

A full measure of independence for Ukraine was the new government's ultimate goal; but this "programa maxima" was not easy to



realize. The situation was fraught with dangers and caution was necessary. In March 1917, Russia still was a power and still holding front against the Central Powers. The Provisional Government still commanded the loyalty of many segments of the Russian armed forces, while the social slogans of the revolution were pushing the issue of national liberation into the background. Without effective means of backing up its demands, the Ukrainian Government had no choice but to commit itself to a program of only national and territorial autonomy within a federated Russian state.

Even this concession, however, was too much for Russia's new rulers to contemplate seriously. Although the revolution rocked the foundations of the state, it did not, in its first stages, weaken the Russian imperialistic tendencies. The leaders of the revolution were Russian patriots, who did not want to weaken the power of the empire by granting freedom to the subjugated nations. They wanted to reconstruct it on different principles—on a pattern that would strengthen rather than weaken mother Russia. This was to be accomplished by mobilizing the ablest elements recognizing the principle of indivisibility of the empire.

Furthermore, Russia was still at war, and they feared that any experiments with the nationality question would precipitate far-reaching territorial changes in the event of her defeat. For this reason the Russian centralists completely refused to submit to any compromises, despite the fact that their leadership was set up with the aid of Ukrainian troops then stationed in St. Petersburg. In short, the events of March 1917 revealed that the democratic convictions of the Russian revolutionaries were very superficial and ended at the point where they became inimical to the interests of the Russian empire—e.g. where they began to negate Russian imperialism by admitting the non-Russian peoples' basic rights to self-determination.

The most appalling weakness of the Ukrainian Government was the lack of any kind of military force. The Russian army had numerous predominantly Ukrainian components which might have put themselves at the disposal of the Centralna Rada had they been stationed in Ukraine. They might have been used even to fight the centralist tendencies of the Russian leaders. Unfortunately, these units were outside the borders of Ukraine, in foreign lands and under Russian command, and in many cases intermingled with Russian units.

Nevertheless, the situation appeared to evolve in favor of the Ukrainians. The Bolsheviks used the chaos of the March revolution to spread among the troops Communist propaganda encouraging them to immediate desertion. Among the first to be fatally affected by this propaganda, were the Russian regiments, while the Ukrainian regiments were better disciplined and more immune to Bolshevik agita-

tion. The Russian high command, quickly recognized the significance of this fact and, in an attempt to exploit them, consented to the formation of separate Ukrainian regiments under Ukrainian command. Ukrainization of some military units was the most effective remedy against their demoralization by the Bolshevik propagandists. This was recognized by General Kornilov in his regulations, issued in September 1917, dealing with the reorganization of military units under his command on the southern front. Higher discipline and morale of the Ukrainian military formations were also noted by missions of the Western Allies, then stationed in Ukraine to observe the development of events that could decide the outcome of the war.

This process of troop nationalization encouraged hopes that the Ukrainian components of the Russian army would eventually fuse into a separate force loyal to the newly created Ukrainian Government. Unfortunately, there were also powerful factors working in the opposite direction.

In the first place, it would be naive to suppose that Communist propaganda was totally ineffective among the Ukrainian troops. Most of them were of peasant stock, and the revolutionary slogans of agricultural reform, skillfully manipulated by the Bolshevik propagandists, could not fail to affect them. Desertions followed, all the more that the soldiers longed for home after years of separation from their families.

Furthermore, the Ukrainian men at the front were horrified by the news of dreadful atrocities that were being committed by the communized Russian regiments in passing through Ukraine after deserting the front. A vivid description of these atrocities was given by the Ukrainian Commissioner in Latycziv, province of Podilla, in his report to the Government in Kiev. He compared the passage of the transient Russian armies to the Tartar invasion and went on to say that "everything in the county was destroyed: farms, barns, cattle, fowl, water wells, and whole villages; the 'saldats' raped women, and only black, burnt poles remain in the areas through which the armies passed." It is not surprising that such news evoked panic among the Ukrainian soldiers. Anxious for the safety of their families, they began to desert, hoping that at home they will be able to organize some form of self-defence.

Desertions of Ukrainians from the Russian army were caused also by the Kiev Government's inability to speed up land reform. The Ukrainian soldier-peasant, soaked with Communist propaganda about the immediate distribution of land, was disturbed by the fact that the Ukrainian Revolutionary Government was not dividing the huge land estates of the nobility among small landowners and peasants. The Ukrainian administration intended to do that, but not without the legislative sanction of a duly constituted parliament, which still



was to be elected. Such procedure required time. The soldier-peasant believed that his immediate presence at home would accelerate the pace of events, forgetting that the government was meanwhile struggling for its very existence and that anarchy and lawlessness unleashed by the revolution constituted its greatest menace.

Thus, although in the initial stages of the war the Ukrainian armed units were well disciplined and faithfully held their posts, they became increasingly more frustrated and anxious to return home as time passed. Moreover, the Russian chauvinists began to oppose the reorganization of the army on ethnic basis, and so the hopes for a Ukrainian army composed of the Ukrainian formations formerly under Russian command fell to the ground.

Such were the general conditions in Ukraine when the second phase of the revolution—the Bolshevik Revolution—broke out in St. Petersburg in October, 1917.

While the March revolution was met by the Ukrainian population with hopeful enthusiasm and was supported by the Ukrainian Revolutionary Government, the Bolshevik revolution aroused fear and expectations of general chaos and anarchy, and immediately met with a negative reaction of the Ukrainian Government. The Centralna Rada condemned the Bolshevik revolution and proclaimed—without St. Petersburg's consent—an autonomous Ukrainian National Republic (by the third manifesto—the “Third Universal”—of November 20, 1917). Theoretically, Ukraine still adhered to the concept of federation with Russia but in reality it was completely on its own.

The Western Allies, whose main concern was that the Russian front be maintained at all costs, were quick to recognize the importance of this development, as evidenced by the following diplomatic notes:

*Representative of Great Britain —*

*His Excellency the President  
of the Council of Ministers  
of the Ukrainian National Republic.*

*Excellency:*

*I have the honor to inform you that the Government of Her Majesty of Britain has appointed me, by telegraph, as the only Representative of Great Britain in Ukraine.*

*My Government has charged me with the pleasant duty of assuring you of our good-will. It is ready to support with all its strength the Ukrainian Government in all its efforts to establish and maintain order and good government, and to stand against*

*Central Powers, enemies of democracy and humanity.*

*On my part, Mr. President, I have the honor to assure you of my complete devotion to the realization of our common ideals.*

*Picton Bagg,  
Representative of Great Britain in  
Ukraine*

*Emissary of the Republic of France —*

*Kiev, December 21, 1917/January 3, 1918*

*The Secretary General  
of External Affairs  
of the Republic of Ukraine.*

*Dear Mr. Secretary General:*

*I have the honor to inform the Government of the Republic of Ukraine that the Government of the Republic of France has appointed me as Emissary of the Republic of France to the Government of the Republic of Ukraine.*

*I would like to inquire about the day and the hour when an interview could be granted to me with the chief of the Government in order that I may pay my respects and present my credentials.*

*Please be assured, Mr. Secretary General, of my highest regards.*

*Tabouis*

*Emissary of the Republic of France*

The new republic, however, faced a menace from within—the Ukrainian Bolsheviks, who schemed to master the situation in the country. On December 12, 1917, they staged an anti-Government revolt in Kiev, but the uprising failed. The Bolsheviks then decided to reach their goal by “legitimate” means—by seizing control of the Ukrainian Government from within the pre-parliamentary Centralna Rada, in which they were represented.

But here they also failed. An all-Ukrainian congress of about 2,500 delegates from various parts of Ukraine, which met in Kiev in the latter part of December and from which the Bolsheviks hoped to draw support, voiced confidence in the Centralna Rada and approved

the policies of the Government. The mere 150 delegates who supported the Bolshevik cause were an eloquent evidence of the "popular support" the Bolsheviks enjoyed in Ukraine. The numerical "strength" of the Ukrainian Bolshevik party had been demonstrated even more eloquently a few days earlier, on December 16, when the party's general assembly met in Kiev and was attended by 54 delegates from 24 organizations with a total membership of 18,000.

Realizing the hopelessness of their situation, the Bolshevik leaders departed to Kharkiv and issued a proclamation charging the Ukrainian Government with "petty bourgeois politics, nationalism, and chauvinism."

The Ukrainian Bolsheviks' failure to establish their own regime in Ukraine was a clear indication to the Bolsheviks in St. Petersburg that Ukraine could only be subdued by force, and they proceeded to do just that. To have a "legitimate" excuse for this venture, they helped the Ukrainian Bolsheviks to form a puppet government in Kharkiv, which, in turn, invited the Russians to send troops against the Ukrainian Government. The Kharkiv "government" had no popular support, but the support came from the Russian armed forces under W. Antonov-Ovseenko. Following the Ukrainian Government's rejection of an unacceptable ultimatum from St. Petersburg, the Russian troops invaded Ukraine and the war began.

The Ukrainian Government severed relations with the St. Petersburg Government and, on January 22, 1918, proclaimed Ukraine a sovereign state.

Thus, the year of 1918 in Ukraine had a bloody beginning. Now the Ukrainian Government faced the formidable task of organizing its defenses.

Unfortunately, as already mentioned, the basic reserves of a potential Ukrainian army—the Ukrainian units of the Russian army, which not so long ago were fighting in the front lines—had been demobilized and sent home. The organizing of a dependable military force had to be started from scratch.

The situation called for volunteers, and the war-weary Ukrainian population could produce volunteers only from among its most idealistic elements—primarily the students. To them went the Government's appeals, and they responded. Such was the origin of the Student Battalion that was destined to fulfill its tragic but heroic duty near a town called Kruty.

## ORGANIZATION OF YOUTH AND THE STUDENT BATTALION

The organization of the Student Battalion in January 1918 was not entirely an ad hoc affair. Before the war, active participation of youth in the Ukrainian liberation movement was widespread, and it increased rapidly when the revolution broke out. Soon after the Ukrainian Government was formed, youth organizations were being established in the anticipation that it may be their duty to protect the homeland from anarchy and chaos. As early as June 1917, a meeting of representatives of the Kiev high-school student societies resolved that each high-school student should always be ready to serve his country in time of need. A Union of high-school students of the city of Kiev was formed, with a membership of over 2000 and a journal of its own, the "Kameniar." This form of organization spread from Kiev to other centers of Ukraine.

Most successful was the youth's resistance against the demoralizing Communist propaganda. (For this, many of them paid with their lives later on.) As one participant of the events of that day said, "The Ukrainian students gave the Ukrainian cause all their efforts and all their strength; Ukrainian students were everywhere; they taught, organized, and led." This devoted work of the students was highly valued by the Ukrainian Government. It later organized special youth festivals, and in August 1917 the youth itself staged a manifestation of loyalty to its pre-parliament, the Centralna Rada.

The attention of the youth movement was directed at various aspects of cultural and political life of the nation, depending on which problems were considered most pressing at the time. Thus, when a clash between Ukraine and the Bolsheviks became inevitable, the leaders of the youth movement decided to organize armed units, even though the Government, reluctant to risk the lives of the most promising element of the nation, at first refused to support the move. Nevertheless, special youth committees and recruiting centers were organized, and appropriate announcements began to appear in the press. These announcements reveal that the youth leaders of that time had a very realistic understanding of the seriousness of the political situation.

When the situation became indeed very critical in January 1918, special mass meetings of youth were called. In Kiev, the students of the University of St. Volodymyr and of the newly formed State University decided to organize a student battalion of Sichowi Strilci (Fusiliers of Sich), and the high-school students followed their example. The youngsters of the last two years of Kyrylo-Metodij Brotherhood High-School met on January 19, and decided to join in the efforts of the university students. The director of the high-school, who was present at the meeting, agreed to grant the volunteers an official



leave of absence for the time of service in the armed forces. It is interesting to note that the decision of this meeting was carried out by all the participants, except one.

The parents eyed these happenings with worried looks, realizing the disproportion of strength and the inexperience of the under-aged children vis-a-vis the requirements of a battlefield. But, they were all moved by the pathos and idealism of the youth. Full of worry and anxiety, the parents silently agreed with the decisions of their children.

Despite the gravity of the situation, the recruiting for the battalion was orderly. The enlisted volunteers, full of optimism, marched through the streets of Kiev and occupied the barracks vacated by the cadets of a military academy, who had already departed to the front lines.

At first the battalion's training was planned to last a considerable period of time, since the students were expected to form a special guard of the Government and were not for front-line duty. However, as the situation grew worse from day to day, these plans had to be changed. There were several battle-weary units in the front lines, which had to be relieved if the front was to be maintained successfully. It was then that the decision was made to send the Student Battalion to the front. The volunteers received the news with great joy, despite the fact that their training did not run its full course.

## AT THE FRONT

Slowly, at a wide arc reaching from the southeast to the northwest opposite the city, the Bolshevik forces were advancing toward Kiev. The main force was concentrated at the northeast. It was against these concentrations that the Student Battalion was expected to take positions at an important railway junction in Bakhmach. The news from the front became more and more alarming, anxiety over the fate of the battalion increased. Only the students themselves were calm, and their departure was very orderly despite the dramatic scenes that occurred when the parents came to bid their sons good-by. The pessimism of the parents was soon overcome by the cheerfulness and optimism of the youths.

At the Kruty station the battalion joined the remnant of what had been a unit of cadets of the Kiev military academy, now only about 250-men strong, and a well disciplined group of about 40 revolutionary soldiers. The Student Battalion itself counted 300, which brought the total strength of the Ukrainian force at Kruty to about 600 officers and men. They had an improvised armored train—a converted freight car with a gun mounted on the top of it. The battalion reached Kruty on January 27 and dug in on both sides of the railroad embankment the following day. The intelligence reports put the enemy force at 3,000 infantry and 1,500 extremely well trained and battle-experienced sailors of the Baltic Fleet plus 12-gun battery of artillery.

The enemy's numerical superiority and better equipment and arms had decided the battle in advance. The Student Battalion's supply of ammunition was only 40 rounds per man. The Bolshevik attack was also facilitated by the fact that about 2 miles from the station there was a small woods concealing their advance.



## THEN CAME JANUARY 29

The attack, preceded by a heavy but not very accurate artillery fire, began at 9:00 A.M. At first only small groups of the enemy advanced. Later the blows thickened because the defenders held on to their positions. New and more numerous enemy came in place of those who fell. The deciding moment of the battle came when the Student Battalion ran out of ammunition, and its commander, Omelchenko, was wounded. Finally, when a cadet unit occupying a nearby



position received orders to withdraw, the students misinterpreted the orders and went into attack.

In a hand-to-hand battle that followed, the enemy's superiority became fully apparent, the whole battalion was practically encircled and the carnage began. Most of the students died in battle; 35 were captured, 7 of them wounded.

The remnant of the battalion assembled by a railroad train. There were three cars full of wounded. Under heavy fire of the enemy the train started its return trip. Meanwhile, the cadets began an orderly retreat, blowing up bridges and roads in order to delay the enemy advance on the capital.

Conflicting estimates of the total Ukrainian losses at Kruty circulated for a long time after the battle. The first reports to reach Kiev immediately after the battle indicated that there were absolutely no survivors, but later investigations revealed that approximately 50 percent of the entire Ukrainian force died in battle with the heaviest losses suffered by the Student Battalion.

Of the 35 students taken prisoner, the 7 who were wounded escaped death by being transferred to a hospital and later sent to the rear with Bolshevik casualties. The remaining 28 were questioned and brutally tortured all night by the angry "saldats," who could not comprehend the courage and determination which enabled the students to withstand the onslaughts of a vastly superior force for so long. An eye-witness of these brutal interrogations later described the atrocities committed on the prisoners. He said that the students were mercilessly whipped and beaten with fists and rifle butts. One student's hair was pulled from his scalp by handfuls, while another's glasses were smashed into his eyes. On the morning of January 30, all prisoners were executed. They greeted the firing squad with the Ukrainian national anthem.

The Student Battalion, of course, could not save the capital, but it considerably delayed the Bolshevik advance and thus enabled the Government orderly to withdraw from Kiev and to organize a counter-attack. A reign of terror began in the capital as soon as the Bolsheviks took over. In the first two days of the occupation, 5,000 persons were shot by firing squads, including 168 high-school students who had been recruited for the battalion but had not gone to the front due to the insufficient training.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BATTLE

The mere fact of destruction of the battalion as well as the unprecedented terror of the invader greatly contributed to the resistance of Ukrainian population against the Bolsheviks. The people began to support actively operations of Ukrainian armed forces. While the barbaric executions of the Ukrainian prisoners of war and the widespread terror drove the population to resistance for the sake of self-preservation, the unsurpassed valor of the young heroes of Kruty fired the people's imagination and evoked the noblest feelings of idealism and readiness for sacrifice—the elements which were so necessary for the growth of the Ukrainian state.

While morally the battle of Kruty contributed greatly to the consolidation of forces and the hardening of anti-Bolshevik sentiment in Ukraine, it also had another very important result. The slowing down of the enemy advance not only saved the Ukrainian Government and enabled it to withdraw from the capital, but also enabled it to establish contact with the Central Powers. Since Bolshevik revolution in October, the Russian front against the Germans and Austrians practically ceased to exist and the young Ukrainian Republic, which stood alone in its fight against Bolshevism, could hardly be expected to support that front. It is clear today what a mistake it was on the part of the Western Powers to limit their help to Ukraine to mere expressions of sympathy and to ambiguous promises. A concrete and energetic aid by France and Great Britain to Ukraine at that time would have ended the Bolshevik anarchy and would have automatically strengthened the position of the Allies. But this aid never came.

Ukraine, unable to wage war on all fronts, and in order to save its statehood, concluded an advantageous peace treaty with Central Powers in Brest Litowsk. In this treaty, the Central Powers agreed to help Ukraine in its war against the Bolsheviks; in return, Ukraine undertook to assure ample supply of wheat to Austria and Germany, whose populations were starving. With the help of the new allies, the Ukrainian armies were able to push the enemy back and regain the lost territory in February 1918.

One of the Government's first acts after the liberation of Ukraine from the Bolsheviks was to find the bodies of the heroes of Kruty. The Bolsheviks had not allowed them to be properly buried and had abandoned them in a ditch, barely covered with earth. The bodies were buried by the peasants only after the Bolsheviks were thrown back.

On March 19, 7 weeks after the battle, the bodies were exhumed and brought to Kiev. Out of 28 prisoners who had been shot, only 18 could be recognized by their closest relatives (8 students of the State University, 5 students of the St. Volodymyr University, and 5 high-



school students). The bodies—especially the faces of the remaining 10 were mutilated beyond recognition.

The funeral turned into a mass manifestation. Among those who paid their last tribute to the heroes of Kruty was also the President of the Ukrainian Republic and one of the most noted historians of Eastern Europe, Mychajlo Hruschewsky, who delivered a most penetrating and inspiring address. Students from all schools of Kiev took part in the ceremonies and carried thousands of wreaths. The bodies were buried in a specially selected spot in the Kiev Park on the banks of the Dnipro, near the tomb of Askold with a view toward Kruty.

Describing the funeral, L. Starycka-Tcherniakhivska, a noted Ukrainian author, in one of her writings, predicted that this mass tomb would have great significance to the future Ukrainian generations. She compared this "holy tomb" to another revered grave further up the river, that of Taras Shevchenko, the greatest poet of Ukraine, who died as the result of long exile and suffering inflicted upon him by the Tzarist Russian regime: Stressing the enthusiasm and the spirit of these youths, she foresaw that, in future years, the old and the young would be coming to this tomb to draw inspiration and strength for the struggle for their rights. She suggested that the day of their death be proclaimed a day of Ukrainian youth, who from them should be educated on the ideals for which these heroes gave their happiness, and their lives—the ideals of freedom and independence of Ukraine.

Soon thereafter, action was started to raise funds for a monument to be erected on the battlefield of Kruty, and donations began to pour in. Unfortunately, the vicissitudes of war and the final collapse of Ukrainian resistance about 2 years later prevented the realization of the project. Special scholastic funds were established in honor of individuals who fell in the battle. For instance, the Volodymyr Shkurat Fund, for the publishing of scholastic works in natural sciences and cultural history (subjects which particularly interested the fallen heroes).

## ECHO AND THE MESSAGE OF KRUTY

The legend of Kruty has an unusual and inspiring history. The completion of conquest of the Ukrainian National Republic by the Bolsheviks in 1920 interrupted the cult of the fallen heroes. Today the intolerant Soviet regime can hardly be expected to allow the resting place of the Ukrainian warriors to become a national symbol or a shrine of Ukraine. Nor will the Soviet practice of falsifying history permit the accounts of that epic event, and of its full significance, to remain in Soviet Ukraine's history books.

When the Bolsheviks occupied Eastern Ukraine, they forbade any mention of the Battle of Kruty on its anniversary dates. In Western Ukraine, which escaped the Bolshevik rule, little was known about the battle until years after it took place. The post-war years in Western Ukraine were not conducive to a serious and accurate appraisal and public discussion of the very recent period of struggle for liberation. The losses were too great, the wounds still extremely painful; and the new masters of the Western Ukrainians were not too friendly.

Then, a few articles on Kruty, written mostly by the participants of the battle, appeared in the Western Ukrainian publications. The popular response to them swelled into a great wave of patriotic feeling. Popular interest in the Ukrainian Thermopylae revived, and exhaustive studies were undertaken. Researchers discovered attestations of valor of the fallen heroes even in the press of the Communist-ruled Eastern Ukraine.

One such generous testimony came from a Bolshevik officer who participated in the battle on the enemy side and who, about 8 years later, published his reminiscences in the Kharkiv "News" (No. 199, 1926). "The sun met our [Bolshevik] victory," wrote the officer. "Hundreds of dead covered the field . . . many of ours died here. The enemy fought extremely well." As though to excuse himself for the frankness so unusual to a true Bolshevik, he added, "We admire a brave enemy." Coming from a Bolshevik officer, educated in restraint and indifference to the spiritual qualities of the "bourgeois nationalists," this was a homage to greatness.

The cult of the Battle of Kruty was resumed by the youth—at first by the scouts and later by the students. In 1931, the congress of students proclaimed the anniversary of Kruty a students' day and initiated a tradition of marking this day by fasting and donating the money thus saved to a fund for the aid of the Ukrainian political prisoners in Poland. Soon the students were joined by other youth, and the commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the Battle of Kruty turned into a nationwide manifestation. The churches in all cities and villages held commemorative services in honor of the heroes



and were filled to capacity; appropriate ceremonies were held everywhere. Pamphlets devoted to Kruty were published and distributed. A monument, which could not be erected at the place of battle, was erected by the Ukrainian students in Lwiw, in the students' union building. The influence of the legend of Kruty on the population was overpowering. It accounted for the people's strong resistance against communism and, therefore, for the almost complete ineffectiveness of communism among Ukrainian population of Western Ukraine. This, incidentally, explains why today the Soviet Russian regime in Western Ukraine, incorporated in USSR since World War II, is particularly severe.

In the light of the foregoing it is easy to imagine the fullness of tragedy, which for the Ukrainians was World War II. After the war the entire Ukraine was under Bolshevik domination, which especially in the Western parts was particularly severe, a fact substantiated by all those that had a chance to visit Western Ukraine after the war.

The Battle of Kruty is of great significance to the Ukrainian nation and to the world at large. In its positive and negative aspects, it serves as both inspiration and warning to the freedom-loving peoples. The noble feat of the Ukrainian youth at Kruty—the love for their country, the readiness to die for its safety and freedom, the indomitable spirit and courage and tenacity in the face of the overwhelming odds on the battlefield—will be an everlasting source of inspiration to the future Ukrainian generations.

On the other hand, this bloody event of January 29, 1918, combined with its dreadful aftermath—the torturing and mass execution of the war prisoners and the subsequent rage of terror, murdering of innocent civilians, rapes, and plundering of the country in the few weeks that followed, revealed what Bolshevism really was: a Moloch, breathing evil and destruction, hungry for the flesh and the spirit of the free man, and destined to grow to monstrous proportions and to cast its shadow upon the whole world. It was Russian Bolshevism's debut—its first contact with a foreign nation which refused to submit meekly. Ukraine was that first nation.

In this negative sense, the Battle of Kruty and its aftermath symbolize the communistic "civilization" that threatens to engulf the free world of today.

The blight of Communist rule, covering about half the globe, is appropriately compared to the scourge that had descended upon Europe from the barbaric East with the invasion of Tartars in the 13th century. In 1918, as in 1240, Ukraine's tragedy consisted in her being the first European victim of aggression by a barbarian hitherto

unknown, equipped with strange weapons and tactics the world knew little or nothing about. And no one hastened to her side.

In 1918, the West failed to realize the potentiality of Bolshevism and to help Ukraine to crush it in its very inception. It is futile now to reminisce on this failure of the West at a crucial juncture of history—a failure for which our civilization now stands in danger of paying the price of extinction. That much must be said, however: The tragedy of Kruty will be repeated in the West, if the latter fails to mobilize its spiritual forces and pursue a wise, realistic policy in getting ready for the invasion that first began in Ukraine in January 1918.

Let Kruty be a warning to the Free World!